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Khrushchev Changed East-West Relations

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Few men have moved and shaken the 20th Century as much as Nikita Sergeyevitch Khrushchev.

It will be years before historians can begin to measure with accuracy how much he altered communism, the relations between East and West, and the world balance of power, during his reign as the top Soviet leader.

What can be recorded now is that as every effective Communist is supposed to do, Nikita Khrushchev profoundly changed the status quo. But the way he did it, and the direction of change, might amaze those who preceded him in the Marxist-Leninist pantheon.

He inherited, or rather, seized control of, a near-monolithic Communist empire. He wrenched the ruthless Communist god who had dominated it out of his bier, although he wept at Stalin's death.

Role for 'Goulash'

Khrushchev remolded the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary process in a new, more palatable form, pushing out of public sight the weapons of terror. He put more emphasis on "goulash" than on physical revolt. Peace was his theme, not war—with the notable exceptions of ideological warfare, "wars of national liberation," and subversion. Communism was now so strong, he proclaimed, that it could conquer capitalism without resort to all-out war.

Khrushchev may have diverted the Communist empire from a collision course with the West. His policies did allow the people of the Soviet bloc some new freedom to breathe and to live. He raised the ambitious prospect that some day there might be peaceful co-exis-

tence between East and West.

In the process, the Communist mantle was torn into two bitterly-rival designs, Moscow's and Peking's. Strands of independence fell on lesser Communist capitals in between. The dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis was at work in a

manner that its doctrinaire creators never foresaw.

Survival, not altruism, was Khrushchev's principal motivation for what he called "creative Marxism-Leninism."

In a memorable remark after the United States and the Soviet Union averted nuclear war over the Cuban missile crisis of October, 1962, Khrushchev said: "... There began to be a smell of burning in the air . . ."

Khrushchev had not fought his way to the top of the Soviet hierarchy to risk the whole future of Soviet Communism on a throw of the nuclear dice.

The Chinese Communists, with their hundreds of millions of have-not masses could scoff at the United States as a "paper tiger"; Khrushchev told them, "this paper tiger has nuclear teeth . . . and one cannot treat it lightheartedly."

War Is 'Madness'

" . . . It is madness," Khrushchev warned Peking, "to preach that controversial questions among states should be settled by war, madness which can bring nothing but suffering and calamity to the people; it has nothing in common with the teachings of Marx and Lenin . . ."

There was no evidence at all that Communist China actually was advocating "war."

Peking was and has been

readier to risk war, but only because Red China's rulers believed they could push the United States further than Khrushchev would venture, without triggering war. Red China, in fact, has been very careful to avoid pressing the United States too far.

By facing the first real threat of world destruction since the beginning of the Nuclear Age, the United States and the Soviet Union learned from that traumatic experience that a misstep could plunge both to disaster.

Retreat from War

But the Soviet Union and the United States as nuclear powers both knew there was an indirect way to fall into nuclear war—by

miscalculating the other side's intentions.

It was a measure less of Khrushchev's nerves than of his determination for the Soviet Union to survive, that he stepped back first in the Cuban confrontation. It was a measure of the sagacity and statesmanship of the late President Kennedy, with parallel concern about the survival of the West, that enabled the Soviet Union to step back in peace.

A year before, after the Soviet Union's 22d Party Congress in 1961, where wholesale admission was made that thousands of leading Soviet figures were put to death during Josef Stalin's terrible years, Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg was asked how he escaped the purges. He replied: "It was a lottery, and I had a lucky number."

Khrushchev had a pocketful of lucky numbers. But he also had much more. He had ability, vitality, audacity and dexterity. He alternately used these skills to raise the threat of war, or the hope of peace.

Cat-and-Mouse Role

No one who saw Khrushchev in operation inside his own country and in world capitals could doubt that this ungainly, loquacious, unsophisticated-looking figure, who de-

scribed his parents as "muzhiks, the poorest of the poor," was one of the shrewdest men on the world scene. He demonstrated that time after time as he played cat-and-mouse in recurring crises over Berlin and around the globe.

But he was not shrewd enough to make good his gamble on the Cuban missile crisis, or to prevent a roaring breach with Communist China.

For years while the West increasingly suspected it, and the East furiously denied it, the Moscow-Peking rivalry was being fought out behind the scenes, strongly influencing the zigzags of Khrushchev's global policies.

The storm burst with the end of the 1962 Cuban crisis.

Khrushchev and his colleagues, Peking fumed, "have completely reversed

enemies and comrades" and "are bent on seeking Soviet-United States cooperation for the domination of the world."

Khrushchev had denied the Chinese Communists the nuclear assistance and other material aid that they required to make their own power resound in the world.

He had gone on from the Cuban missile crisis to agree, with President Kennedy, on an instant communication "hot line" between Moscow and Washington to reduce the danger of war by miscalculation.

The next U.S.-Soviet step was more impressive; a treaty banning all nuclear weapons tests above ground or in the water. Part, perhaps much, of Khrushchev's motivation was to



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Nikita Khrushchev is shown with diplomats at Pitzunda, his Black Sea retreat on

Aug. 17, 1963. Secretary of State Dean Rusk is at left.

help isolate Red China from the rest of the world.

On those stepping stones, the United States and the Soviet Union increasingly reached out to the other agreements to reduce the tension between them.

Touching fingertips with the West, the Soviet Union hurled its own verbal thunderbolts at the attacking Chinese: "dangerous adventurists," "splitters," "opportunist" and "war-mongers" who aspire, "like Stalin in his day, (to) sit aloft like a god above all the Marxist-Leninist parties and settle all matters of their policy and work."

Challenges from Mao

China's Mao Tse-tung challenged Khrushchev on what both regarded as the most fertile hunting grounds for recruits to communism, the "storm

centers of world revolution": the underdeveloped nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The battle for Communist leadership was marked out, as well, in the developed nations on every continent, inside every party and faction.

Moscow and Peking could revert to talk or motions of conciliation, but the illusion of monolithic communism was gone.

Khrushchev's place in history appeared to be that of a catalyst for great transitions: inside the Soviet Union, in the Communist third of the world, and in the East's relations with the West.

The peasant boy from the village of Kalinovka hardly could have dreamed of making that large a mark on the globe.